

*Mr. Denne's Observations on a Triple Stone Seat
at Upchurch in Kent. In a Letter to Mr. Gough.*

Read at the SOCIETY of ANTIQUARIES February 19, 1795.

DEAR SIR,

MR. Thomas Fisher has favoured me with the inclosed delineation * of a triple stone seat in the chancel of the church of Upchurch, a parish in East Kent, situated between Rainham and the river Medway; and, as, to the best of my recollection, these stalls differ in form from any specimen hitherto exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries, I am inclined to believe that this representation of them may not be unacceptable.

Had the drawing passed under my inspection before I had concluded my remarks on stone seats in general, I should certainly have offered it as an instance in point to corroborate the notion I had advanced, that the stalls yet extant in the chancels of many of our parish churches, were not originally constructed for the conveniency of the officiating clergy, but for the use of the impropiators, who had unquestionably a right of admission into the chancel during the celebration of divine worship.

The church of Upchurch belonged to the Premonstratensian abbey of Lisle Dieu in Normandy, and that religious house seems, at an early period, to have acquired an appropriation of it; because when archbishop Wittlesey, in the year 1369,

* Plate XI

A



augmented

augmented the portion for the maintenance of a perpetual vicar to five marks *per* year, it is set forth in the instrument of ordination, that it had been for some time appropriated. The hospital of St. Catharine near the Tower appears to have had a temporary interest in this church; but king Henry the Sixth, in the 17th year of his reign, at the request of archbishop Chicheley, granted the appropriation of Upchurch, and the advowson of the vicarage, to the newly established college of All Souls in Oxford, in which body they still remain. In the eighth year of Richard the Second this church was valued at £.23. 6s. 8d. and the parsonage now consists of a house, other buildings, yards, &c. and of eighty-two acres of glebe land, of which seventeen are arable, sixty-four of meadow, or fresh marsh, and two salt marsh, together with the tythes of more than 500 acres of land [a].

By the munificence of the founder the college is also entitled to a capital manor farm in the parish, situated at a small distance westward from the church. It is called Horsham, and contains upwards of 1000 acres of land [b].

■ As the society had in this district possessions so ample and beneficial, the management of the estate must often have required the superintendence of some of its principal members. During their abode, when they resorted to church, there cannot be a doubt of their having placed themselves in the chancel, which was to be repaired at the expence of the impropiators; and, as it may be reasonably concluded, in the stalls under review. But, concerning these stalls, it is observable, that the fellows of a college were satisfied with those of a very plain construction, whereas in the neighbouring church of Chatham, a triple seat, embellished with a profu-

[a] Haisted's History of Kent, vol. II. p. 545.

[b] Ibid. p. 543.

sion of the finest sculpture, was prepared for the accomodation of the canons of Leedes priory [c].

To men of high rank, and to patrons of livings only, was there an indulgence of fixed seats in a church ; but, in former times, as well as in the present age, parishioners would often dispute about seats, two or more being claimants of the same seat. In order to stop a practice so scandalous, and that frequently occasioned an interruption of divine offices, it was decreed in a synod of the diocese of Exeter, held under its prelate Peter de Quivil, in the year 1284, that, with an exception to noble persons, and to patrons, no one should in future claim any seat, but that whoever first entered a church for the purpose of devotion, he might chuse at his pleasure a place for praying [d]. This constitution is cited with the view of contrasting with it a letter upon the same subject, written in 1625, by Dr. Buckeridge, who then presided over the diocese of Rochester, but was in 1628 removed to Ely. The original letter is kept with the records of the city of Rochester, from which a transcript was made by Mr. Fisher, and on the perusal of it one is somewhat surprized to meet with such restrictions and prohibitions so earnestly pressed by a bishop in the 17th century. The letter was addressed " To
" the right worth my very loving friends the Major of Ro-

[c] *Vetusta Monumenta*, vol. III. Pl. IV. and *Archæologia*, vol. X. pp. 301, 310.

[d] Wilkins, *Concil. Magn.* vol. II. p. 140. Item audivimus, quod propter sedilia in ecclesia rixantur multoties parochiani, duobus vel pluribus unum sedile vendicantibus ; propter quod grave scandalum in ecclesia generatur, et divinum sæpius impeditur officium ; statuimus quod nullus de cætero quasi proprium sedile in ecclesia valeat vendicare, nobilibus personis et ecclesiarum patronis duntaxat exceptis ; si qui orandi causa primo ecclesiam introierit juxta propriæ voluntatis arbitrium sibi eligat orandi locum.

" chester,

“ chester, Mr. Dyer, vicar, and the churchwardens of the
“ p’ish of St. Nicholas in Rochester theis be——

“ After my very hartie commendac’ons I have bin moved
“ by Sir Robert Crayford, and some others, concerninge seats
“ in yo’ p’ish church of St. Nicholas, in w^{ch} I coulde have bin
“ content that yo’ selves, amongst yo’ selves, should have soe
“ disposed therein, that I should rather have approved yo’
“ judgment then given any direc’on at all. I know there are
“ certen knights, and ladies, and others, inhabitinge in other
“ neighboring parishes, who, out of devotion to the preaching
“ of the Gospel, resorte to yo’ church, who cannot clayme
“ any right of seats therein, yet I hold it fitt, that when
“ they doe come, they should have places answerable to their
“ rancke and quality. ffor myne owne p’ticular opinion I
“ doe not thincke it fitt that men and weomen should be
“ placed in the same seats, neither that weomen should be
“ allowed to sitt in the chauncell, wh^{ch} was instituted for
“ clarkes. If you thinke good you may dispose of such knights
“ in the seats in the quier. And it had bin fitt (for the avoyd-
“ ing all contenc’on about higher roomes in such publique
“ assemblies), that you had reserved two of the principall and
“ highest pewes, on one side of the church, where such la-
“ dies, and others, that are straungers, might sett, when they
“ had come to yo’ church, w^{ch} if you have done I must much
“ approve, and com’end yo’ judgment, if otherwise, it is not
“ yet to late to make some such disposic’on to the contents
“ of yo’ owne parishoners, and such straungers, as resortē
“ unto you, wherein I forbear further to intemeddle,
“ not doubtinge but that herein you will observe decency,
“ and order, accordinge to all mens’ states and quality. And
“ soe

"foe I comend to the protec'ion of the Almighty, and re-
"naine.

from my lodginge in
"Durlamnowse London,
"this burth of Aprill,
"1625"

"Your assured poor ffreind,

"JO. ROFFENS."

I am, Dear Sir,

Wilmington,
27th Oct. 1794.

truly yours,

S. D E N N E.

P. S. Wishing for some farther information respecting the chancel of Upchurch church, I applied to Mr. Fisher, from whom I received the underwritten answer :

"I cannot find that I have any memorandums of this church ; but I can nevertheless take upon me to say, that there are no arms or cyphers on the screen behind the stalls. Indeed I imagine, that screen to be of subsequent erection. The backs of the stalls are certainly broken off ; but, as I apprehend, from the plainness of their construction, they were never designed to support stone canopies, perhaps they terminated, like the ancient Gothic arm-chairs, thus (B). Pl. XI.

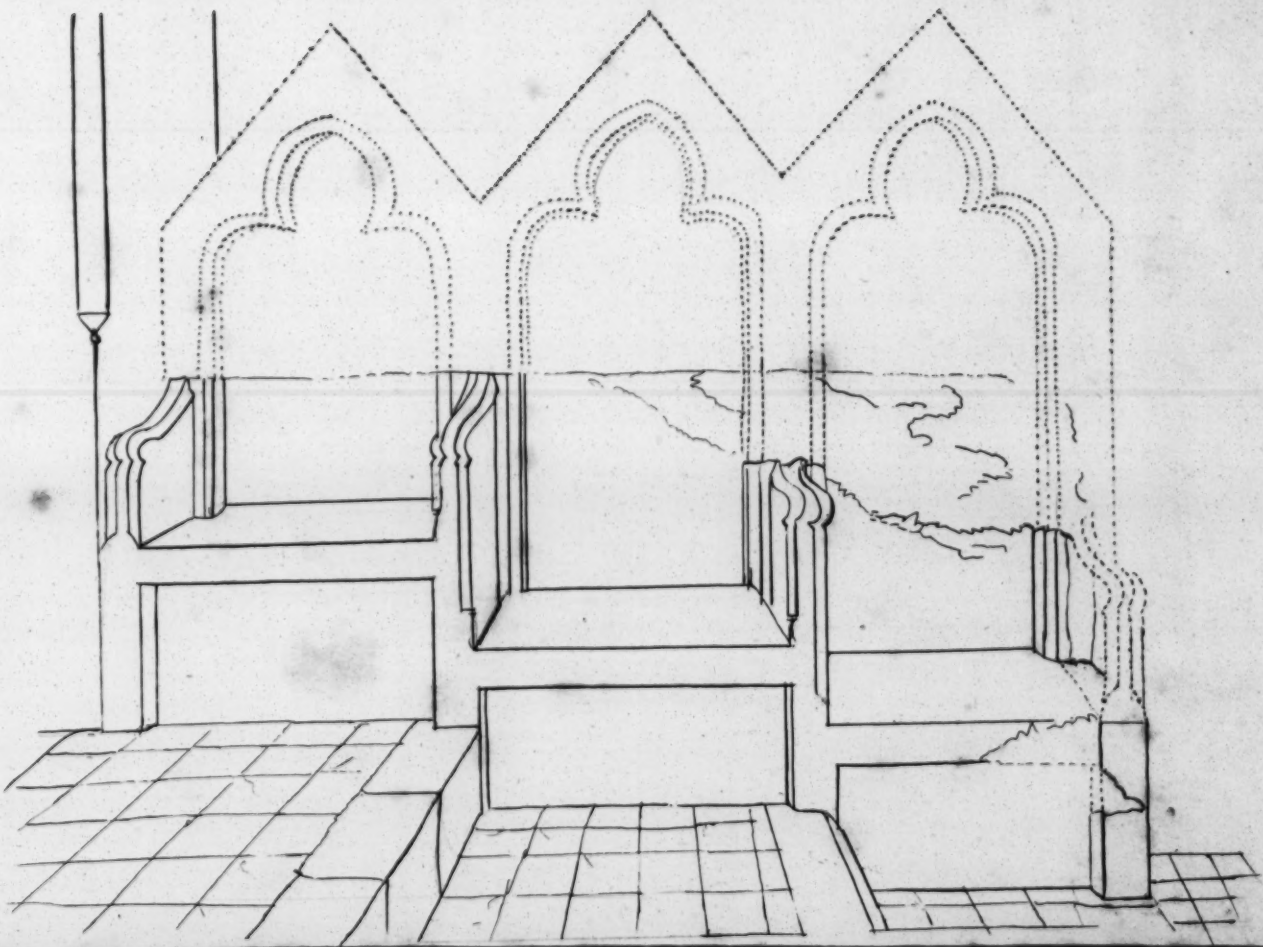
"The area opposite the arch seen beyond the stalls is not paved, but is covered with a few loose boards, from which I suspect that the altar did not stand close to the East wall, but on the verge of the present remaining ancient pavement. Mr. Hasted, I find, mentions the monument in the North chancel, of which the accompanying is an unfinished view, and the painted glass there seen is, I apprehend, the glass he alludes to—as I do not recollect any other in the church. It

B

displays

displays nothing but Gothic tracery, wherefore I imagine it will not merit your attention. The door which appears on one side of the monument leads by a winding stair-case to a Gothic vault under this chantry chancel, full of bones, which I believe to be coëval with the chancel itself, and may, perhaps, have some relation to the monument. This church has three different chancels; that on the North side contains the monument and stained glass. The middle or great chancel, the stalls, and three steps leading up to the altar, besides which there is a South chancel very spacious, with the stone, anciently the altar, lying in the pavement, as also a few words of an old inscription in French, and a singularly small monumental arch in the North wall. Mr. Haisted, I imagine, noticed the great chancel and nave under the descriptions of one aisle, and specifically mentions the two other chancels, because it is probable they are additions to the church of a later date."

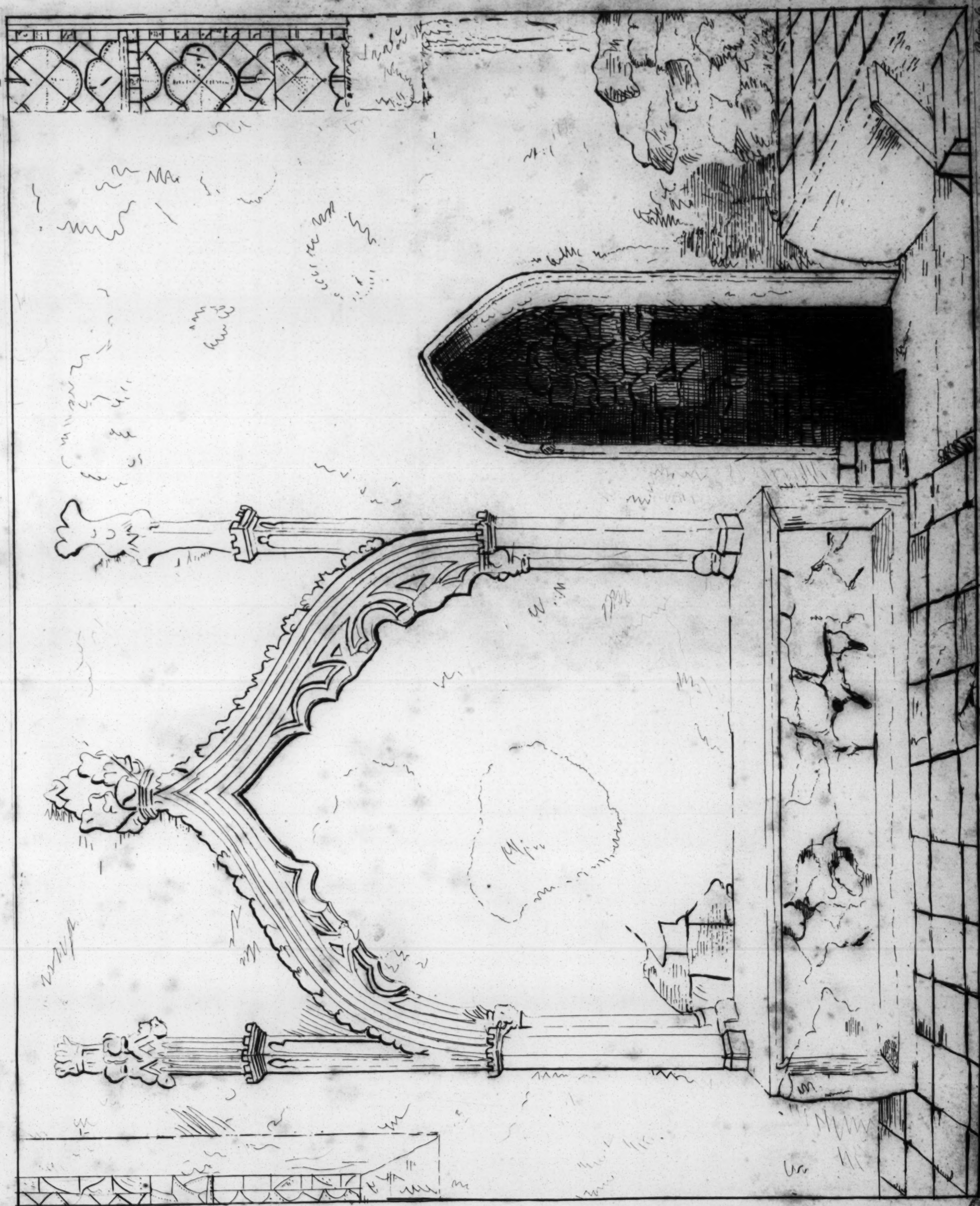




J. Fisher del.

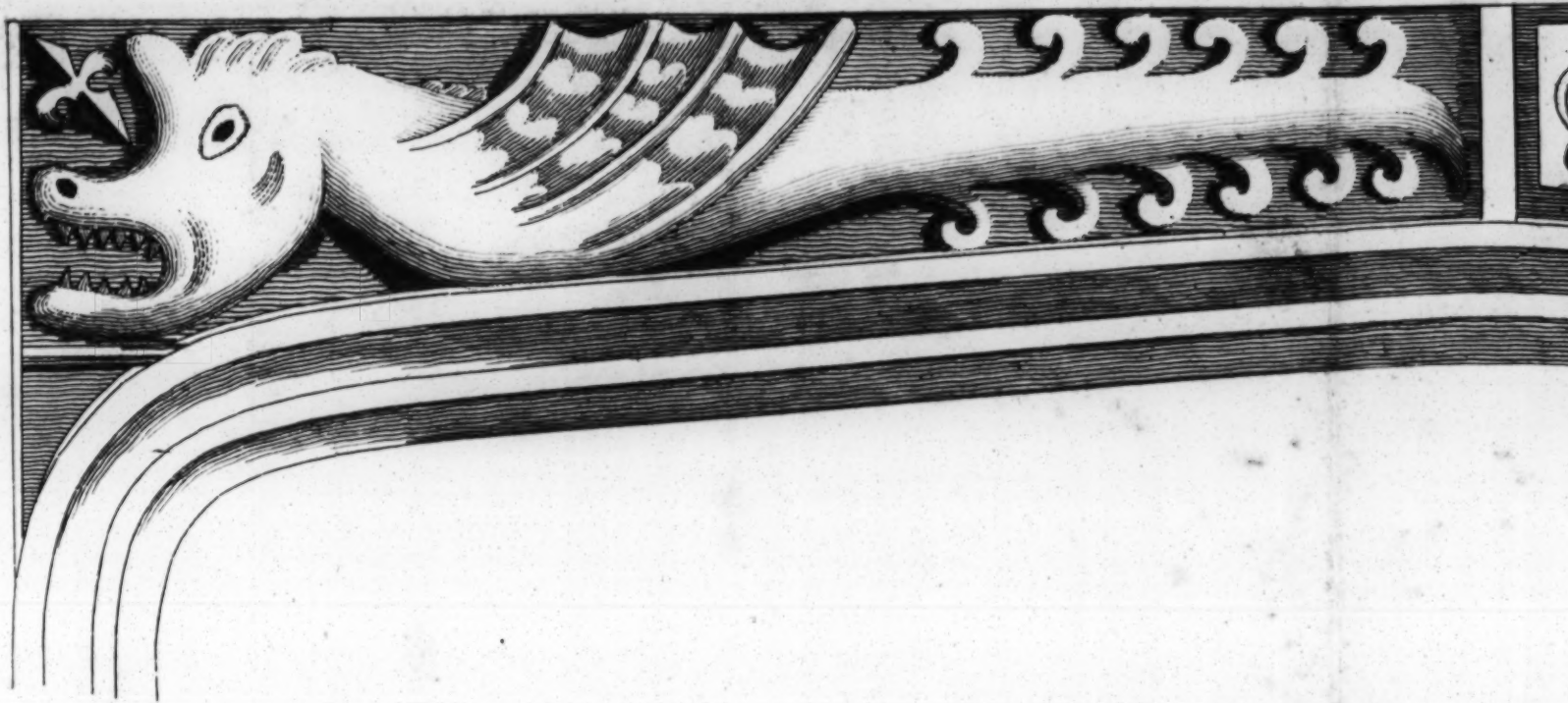
Stalls in the Church of Upchurch, Kent.

B. J. Sc.



View in the North Chantry at Upchurch, Kent.

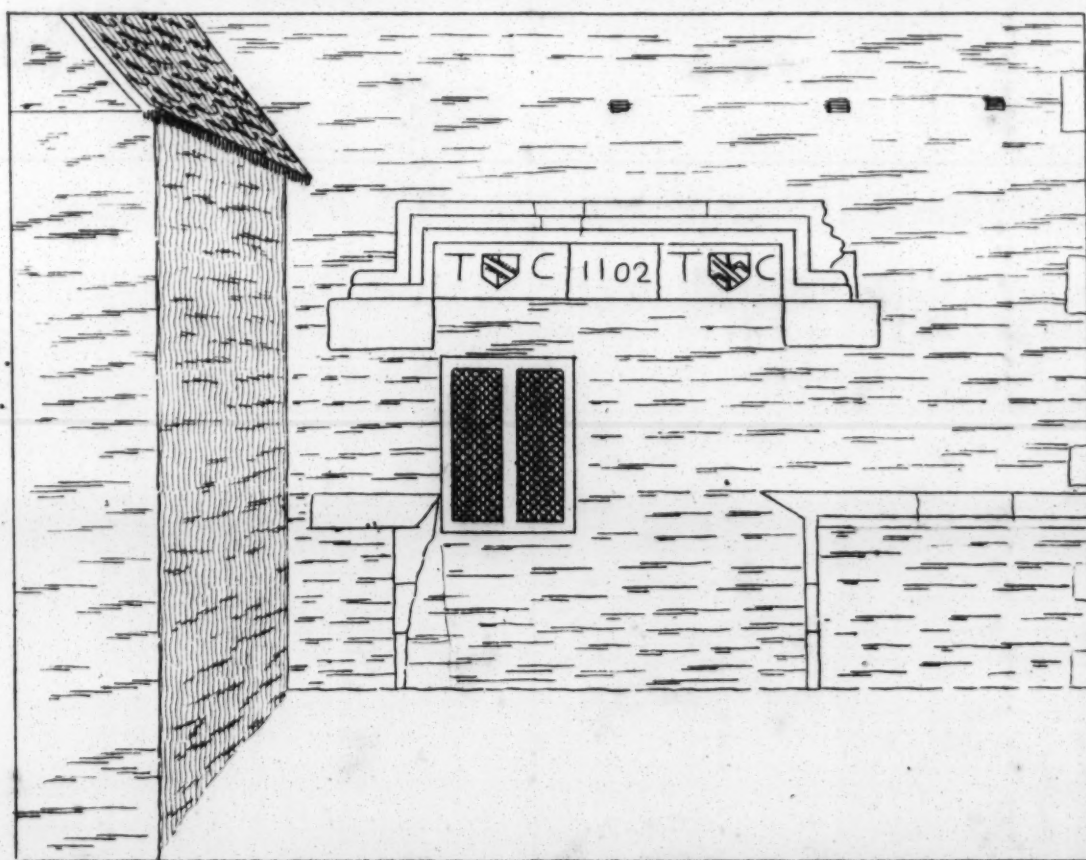
The Helmdon Mantle Tree as given by Professor



Fac Simile of the Helmdon Inscription

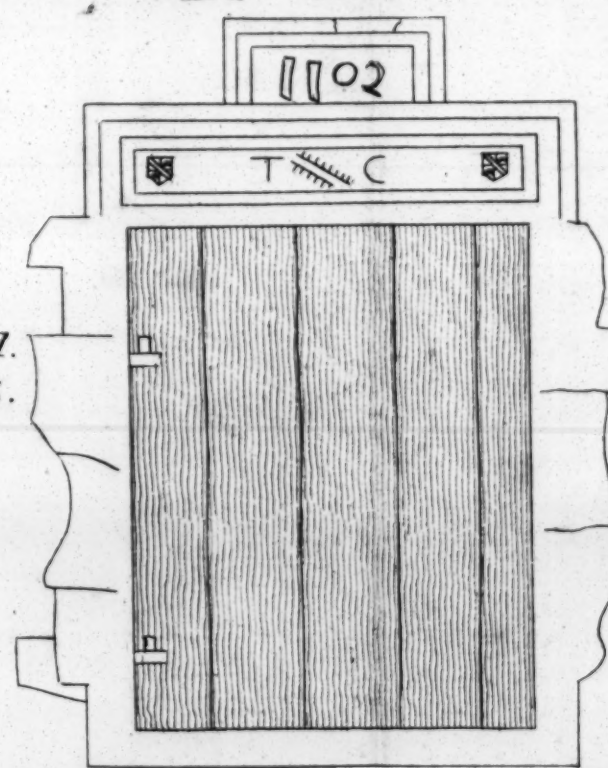


*Nº 2.
Fig. 4.*



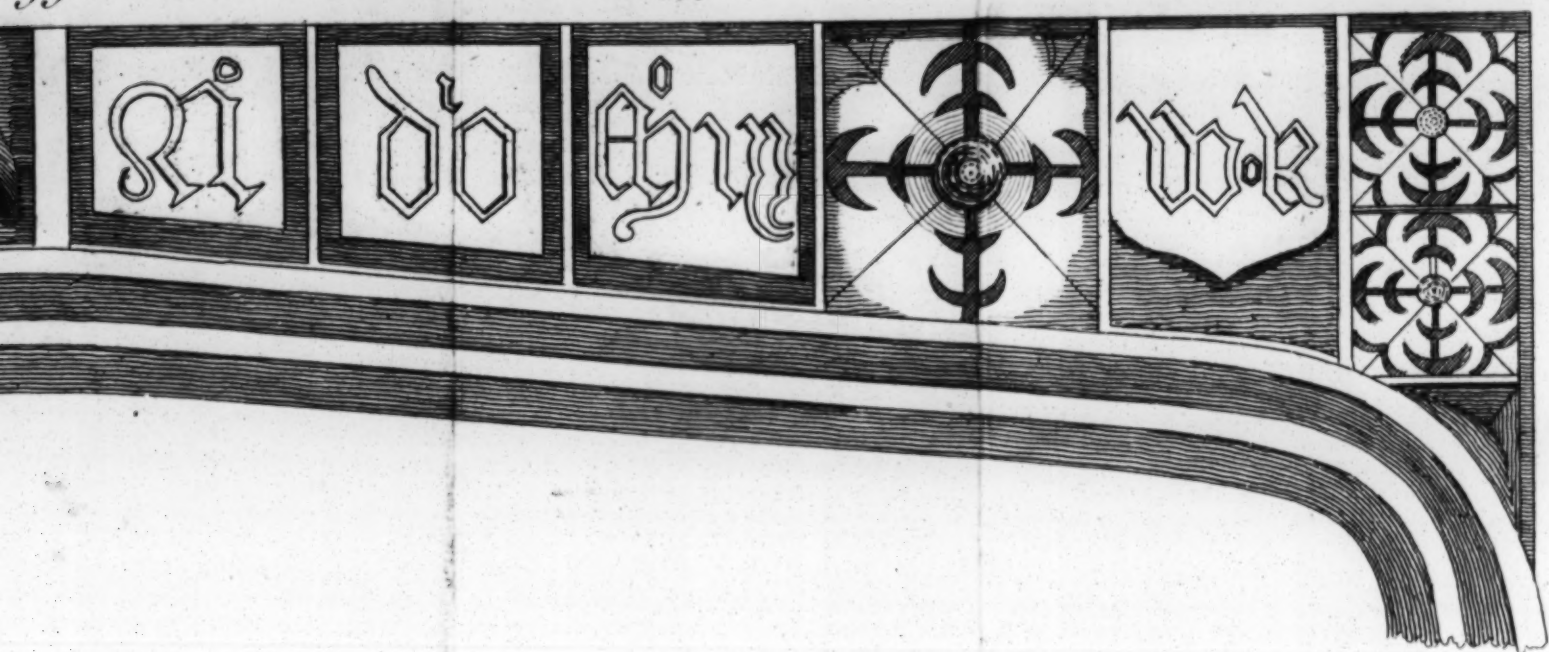
Part of the Oast-house at Preston Hall. p. 108.

*Nº 1.
Fig. 5.*

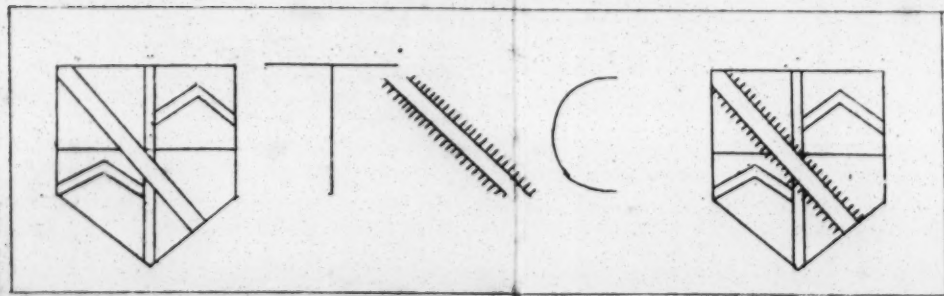
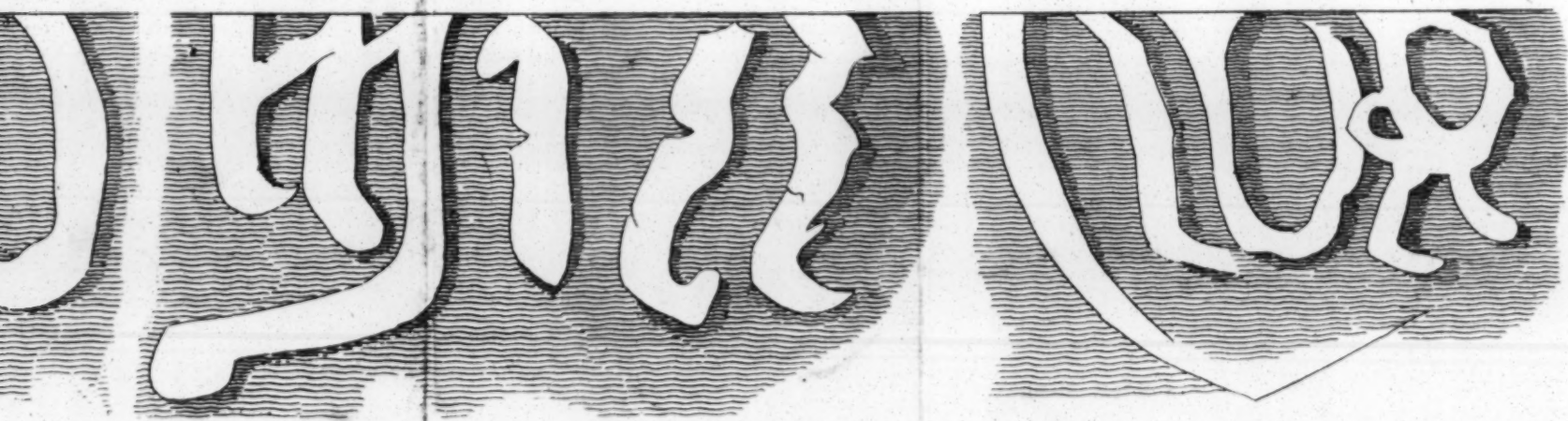


*At the end of the Barn at Preston Hall
p. 107.*

Professor Wallis in the Philos. Trans. XIII. 399.



Inscription as it appeared in 1796.



ston Hall.